

CHAPTER VI.

STATE OF TRADE.

At the death of George II. a partial dulness in the weaving business took place occasioned by an order from Court that the mournings should be muslins. Nothing of this kind was made in Paisley, nor indeed throughout the whole kingdom. India was the only place that supplied the country with this fabric. The want of employment, however, was of short duration, and the trade soon resumed its former activity, and increased yearly till the year 1815. The introduction of muslin fabrics gave it an astonishing momentum. I have said that prosperity continued here till 1815; this arose principally because the most of the goods made were figured, and, of course, of a higher class than those in any other part of the kingdom. In Glasgow, as a centre, and throughout the whole country, plain goods were only made, and disputations between the manufacturers and the weavers of these fabrics took place about the year 1810; by 1812 they assumed a very serious aspect, and those disputes were the principal cause of the political movements which continued till the celebrated 1st of April, 1820, in all of which our good town bore a share; and I may add were ended only when the Reform Bill was passed in 1832.

The first rupture between the masters and the weavers in Scotland took place at Glasgow in the year 1787. The muslins being a new trade, previous to this high prices were paid to the operatives, and they had

been paid at a uniform rate, but in this year the masters combined and reduced them materially. The weavers would not stand this but assembled in great numbers, paraded the streets, and in many cases of those who took work the webs were forcibly taken from them and burned. The parading the streets still continued, and on one occasion the military was called in, and the workmen refusing to disperse they were fired upon, and several were killed, and others mortally wounded. This finished the strike for the time, and the weavers returned to their work. Things remained quiet for a number of years, but the reductions in prices by the year 1809, I may say, were measureless, and it was resolved to petition Parliament to fix a minimum of prices, but Parliament refused this.

On this refusal great agitation ensued, Glasgow was the centre in this case, and different schemes were had recourse to. By various acts, both of the Scotch Parliament and the British, Justices were empowered to fix the price of labour. An action was therefore raised before the Justices for the purpose, and after a litigation of some months the Justices declared, on the 12th Nov., 1812, the rate of wages prayed for reasonable. The masters paid no attention to this final decision of the Justices, it being only declaratory, and the workmen resolved on a trial of strength through the medium of a strike.

CHAPTER VII.

STRIKES AND POLITICS

THIS strike began on the 18th of November, 1812, and did not end till February, 1813. The operatives in Paisley engaged in the strike also although they had not the same complaints as the plain weavers throughout Scotland. This was the only strike that ever was universal in Paisley. Meetings of the weavers had often taken place. An open air meeting had been held on the Gallowgreen, about the year 1794, in reference to a reduction of the price for paper spots. I recollect seeing the crowd, but was too young to know anything of the result. I mind well of a man making a pretty long speech, but I was so innocent I thought he was preaching. Immediately after the strike, trials of several individuals in Glasgow took place, and some were imprisoned, which finished that portion of the drama, but did not preclude the coming on of another agitation. Reform now became the order of the day which degenerated into secret societies for obtaining a change by force of arms, and which culminated in 1816.

When his Majesty George the Third became unable to manage the affairs of Government it was understood that the Prince of Wales would be appointed Regent, but with restrictions. The people of Paisley took up the question of these restrictions keenly. In 1793-94 and '95 a great reform agitation had taken place, and some trifling riots had occurred; but all had quieted down by this time. Now a strong political impulse was

given, a preliminary meeting was held, and a large committee formed; resolutions were prepared, and an address to the Prince expressing the warmest attachment to his Government and person; but intimating, in unequivocal terms, the necessity of a reform of the Commons House of Parliament. A large and influential meeting was held in the West Relief Church, and the resolutions and address were carried unanimously; several excellent speeches were delivered, and, altogether, it was an imposing scene. This meeting was the prelude to a succession of meetings and agitations, which continued till 1820. A meeting took place in Glasgow on the 29th of October, 1816, within the policies the property of Mr. Turner, of Thrushgrove: this was the first out-door meeting in Scotland for Reform. Here great freedom was displayed by the speakers with the character of the Government, which operated like an electric shock on the vast assemblage, which numbered at least 40,000. From this time forward a change came into operation on the minds of the people. The idea became fixed that the Government would not yield one iota of their power: hence secret societies were established, both in Glasgow and throughout the country, and a dreadful oath was concocted, and sworn by every member of the society.

The people in Paisley had no connection with this movement in Glasgow. The Reform Committee here were too well awake to the danger, and kept themselves free of all secret associations; at the same time the more youthful aspirants, and who were afterwards the leaders in agitation, were perfectly well acquainted with what was going on, but were no way engaged in it.

In Glasgow the association was still gaining strength; but in the month of February, 1817, the Government

having got, as they conceived, full information, the committee were arrested, and the Jail filled with those who were deemed rebels, and State trials for high treason followed as a matter of course. On the first indictment, for the trial of Mr. M'Kinlay, being brought forward, Mr. Cockburn and Mr Jeffrey, and a number of the first advocates in Edinburgh, appeared in defence of the prisoner, and the indictment was smashed. A second indictment shared the same fate, and even a third was thrown out. The fourth indictment being sustained, Andrew M'Kinlay was brought to trial, and an individual of the name of Campbell brought forward as evidence; but what was the astonishment of the whole court when Campbell stated, upon oath, that he had been promised a reward by the Crown lawyers for giving certain evidence. This finished the State trials, and all were set at liberty; and Campbell became famed for being a far more ingenious diplomatist than the Crown lawyers. This ended the second agitation in Glasgow.

In Paisley the sensation was great; but although the year 1817 passed onwards quietly, the committees for Reform still continued in existence. Trade, in 1817 and 1818, was extremely dull, and the state of the working population was very bad, nevertheless there was a political calm, something new, after the turmoil and agitation of many years.

This calm, however, was quite evanescent. The public mind was in a very dislocated state. The more temperate men in the Reform leadership began to see danger, and withdrew from the committees, it being apparent that force was contemplated by the new and more reckless leaders. The fatal Manchester meeting, on the 16th August, 1819, was the next great phase in

the tragical and melancholy history of the period. A month before this an open air meeting took place at Meikleriggs Moor for the purpose of petitioning for Reform, but such had been the progress of the new opinions that, on the motion of Mr John Neil, the address to the Prince Regent was negatived, and an address to the nation substituted in its place, urging the people to contend for Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage. By this document the Parliament was thrown in the shade as a worthless thing. It will appear to many strange, both in the leaders and those led, and it was curious they did not see, the total impracticability of their resolution. It looked like many another scheme, very well on paper, and in a well-delivered declamatory speech on a beautiful summer day, but, alas ! that was all. The people rested with the most implicit faith on Mr Hunt, and he had said at a meeting in London, quite unequivocally, that no efficient Reform was to be obtained unless it was effected by force. Now, this saying of his was engraven on the hearts of the people. It is obvious, therefore, that such language had a paramount influence in leading the people into the errors which they committed.

It must be acknowledged that the real cause of disaffection was the intense suffering of the working classes, their subsequent conduct and plottings being only secondary symptoms of the evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

RADICALISM RAMPANT.

IN the latter end of 1819 agitation became rampant in Paisley. Unions were formed throughout the town, and in all the neighbouring towns and villages. Training took place during the harvest months of that year, and continued till March, 1820. The recruits were mostly youths. Vast numbers had no idea of the danger, but came out for fun and excitement. False alarms were often given which threw the squads into most excellent merriment. Mr John Henderson began pike making, and great numbers became proprietors of that deadly weapon, who, I daresay, never intended to use it. The old Reform Committee gave up all connection with the United Association. About the middle of 1819 a public meeting was held in the Rope Work yard, and then and afterwards the insurrectionary movement was managed by Messrs. John Neil, John Henderson, John King, and about twenty others, who formed the central committee. John Henderson never was a member of that committee although he assisted with his advice, and I have often wondered since that he, who displayed so much sagacity in after life, could involve himself so much with such a foolish project as to cause his expatriation at the time. It has been often said that on his way for shipment to America he left an impression on the Elderslie Union that the war had begun in Glasgow and that the Radicals were completely successful. The story, I am compelled to state, is not true, but the reverse was the

case. For particulars I refer to Mr. Hugh Cameron. During this period an active correspondence was carried on with England and the West of Scotland. Messengers were every week coming and going. We had several visits from England. Mr. Neil was sent to Nottingham, who brought home a good account of the state of forwardness. I have no doubt he was made to believe what he stated, for the English, at that time, were proficient in deception. Many a foolish report was circulated here also, and believed. One of them, that 15,000 stand of arms, which had been secreted in 1793, were to be had, and were in good working order. Another, that there was in the village of Linwood a young man of the name of Berry; his acquaintances gave him the subriquet Duc de Berrie. Well, the story went on, that they, the Radicals, were to be commanded by the Duc de Berrie, the lad Berry being a great Radical. This was said by his companions in jest, and in a short time the ridiculous story was believed in earnest. Other commanders were also mentioned, and through time nothing, however ridiculous, but received believers. It was lo! here, and lo! there; and, more especially, the swarming thousands of Glasgow were said to be ready to a man. A census of the Paisley Unions was ordered, and, when the report was brought in, there was great astonishment that the number was so small. The leaders declared that a great error had been committed, and that it would be rectified at next meeting. Accordingly at the first meeting a vast addition was made, which satisfied the great majority. A number, however, thought there was a whawp in the nest, and so broke up their connection with the Union. Meantime the connection between Paisley and Glasgow became quite close. Meetings of

delegates were held in the latter city, and, for the purpose of secrecy, often in some of the adjacent villages. As the day approached for the general rising a messenger was despatched to England to ascertain what state of forwardness their brethren were in. The person sent was one Hugh Graham, on whom they could place implicit reliance. The report, when he came home from his embassy, was, that there was no preparation for a rising, and, in fact, the people knew nothing about it. Now, from Mr. Neil's report, it was stated that instantly when the people of Scotland learned 200,000 were in the field in England they were to rise; and it was very strange that, with this knowledge, the central committee should go on with the insurrectionary movement as if all was right; but on they went, and the "lo! emphatically here, and the lo! there" was carried on as briskly as ever. I recollect that Hardie paid a visit to Paisley a few days before the first of April. I had some little conversation with him, but nothing political. I was much prepossessed with his general bearing; and I am quite convinced that the information got in Paisley in reference to what was to be done, led to the fatal catastrophe at Stirling.

Permit me here to give an episode illustrative of the inner workings of the movement. A regiment of Sharpshooter volunteers, had been embodied. The central committee taking the matter into consideration that, seeing they had resolved to scour the country for fire-arms, it would be a good plan to visit the houses of the Rifles with the view of taking their arms. They, therefore, obtained a muster-roll of the regiment, together with the locality of every individual. This they brought to me, with a request to write out a fair copy, and

classify the corps by streets, and other marks. I took the same and put it in a secure place, thinking it would never be used, as I considered that the turning out of 200,000 insurrectionists would be a safety-valve, having no conceivable idea that it would ever take place. As the first of April approached the central committee became more active than ever, and transferred their sittings to Glasgow. A proclamation was concocted to be issued on the first of April, and the whole of Scotland was to stop working and arm for the coming struggle. The first of April did come, and the proclamation from the Provisional Government at Glasgow was placarded, mostly, however, in the West of Scotland. Had the central committee stopped short here things might have been quashed; but the report of Graham was kept a secret, and they allowed the fatal affairs of Strathaven and Foxbar to go on, and, above all, that of Bonnymuir.

One of the central committee came to me and wanted the corrected copy in reference to the Rifle corps, as it was contemplated to storm their houses at midnight and take their arms from them. When, however, I had learned the length matters were to be carried I had burned the roll; this I told him. He declared me a traitor, and left me in a mighty rage. I had the consolation to think, however, that I had saved many innocent lives on both sides; and, perhaps, if I had done the reverse, I would not have been here to-day to pen these brief notices. True to their former policy the war committee gave out that surgeons were engaged, and nurses to prepare bandages for the wounded, when, in point of fact, nothing of the kind had taken place. One surgeon, indeed, had joined their ranks. He had no practice, nor very likely to have any; and expecting from the non-

sense promulgated that he would find employment and be safe, because he was a surgeon, he promised his services. They boasted also that they would soon have plenty of money. All these boastings, however, were perfectly fallacious—there was not as much money amongst them as would purchase one hundred weight of powder. And as to arms, with the exception of pikes, (and these, the most of them, without shafts) they were not in possession of as many guns as would arm a company of one hundred men; and as for cavalry they had none, nor cannon, nor any other material of war. It will be unnecessary for me to say much upon the state of the town on the first, second, and third days of April. An army had been collected at Glasgow, under Sir Thomas Bradford, of cavalry, infantry, and artillery, and we had a similar force in Paisley; and in three days our war committee was no where to be found—all who considered themselves implicated were looking out, wisely, for a retreat. The Government of Castle-reagh was universally known to be cruel, and the worst that had ruled the country for at least one hundred and thirty years. No mercy, therefore, was to be hoped for, and this made each culprit fear each bush to be an officer. What added much to the general panic arose from what took place at Greenock. The Port-Glasgow volunteers had been marched up to Paisley early in the week, and, under an escort of eighty of these men, five individuals, charged with treason, were, on Saturday, sent to Greenock Jail, that of Paisley being full. They arrived at their destination in due time, and lodged the prisoners in Jail; but on their way back to Port-Glasgow they were assailed by a formidable mob with stones and other missiles. The volunteers turned upon

the mob and fired, and five or six were killed, and others mortally wounded. The assailants immediately retreated and returned to Greenock, forced an entrance into the Jail, and liberated the prisoners. These things aggravated the evil, as it was well known it would exasperate a very unscrupulous Government, who, without doubt, would have their revenge. Everything now in reference to these affairs are matters of history. Permit me, however, to notice the attack upon Foxbar House in search of arms. It has been stated often of the young man Cochrane, who was killed there, that it was from a shot fired from a window of the house; now I have been informed by a man on whom I can rely, who was next to Cochrane when he fell, that the people within the house emptied their fire-arms into the air, and that the shot came from a neighbouring plantation. This he is certain of. The young man was shot through the heart, and, of course, it could not come from the windows above; and the same ball lodged in the elbow of William M'Keechie, of which wound he died, about two years after, in the city of New-York.

In conclusion—On taking a retrospective view, calmly, of the whole proceedings in these unfortunate matters, I am necessitated to conclude that the main cause of the evil arose from the downright falsehoods of the central committee. The base lies which they published, and others to which they gave currency, were, after the affair was over, quite apparent. Not that there were spies amongst them, but they seemed to consider that, by filling the public mind with the idea of a coming revolution, they were preparing for the realization of a great fact—hence their lies, subterfuges, and mendacity, were without bounds. They had no compunc-

tions at the continued baseness of their conduct, nor do I believe they ever felt any qualms of conscience for the bloodshed of which they were the primary cause, nor for the intense sufferings of hundreds, of which they were the authors. After all, the central committee were not all to blame. The whole matter was managed by three or four—the rest were dupes, as well as the general members of the unions. The Government were as great dupes as the rest, and thought the rebel association was most formidable. Had it been a wise, honest, and upright Administration, they could have settled the question without the loss of a single drop of blood—but, alas, they were not. Lord Castlereagh was, to a certain extent, a lunatic all his life, which culminated at his death. I will add, that I might have written to a much larger extent in reference to this 1820 of ours, but the matter would have been so silly and puerile when given in detail, that no person would consider it worthy of perusal.

THE ANTI-BURGHER CHURCH

Was built in the year 1756, and the Rev. Mr Alliee was the first minister. He was a most excellent and acceptable man. The Anti-burghers were strict Covenanters; nevertheless, they were warmly attached to the House of Hanover, and the Revolution Settlement. Like their brethren of the Abbey Close, they were not without their afflictions. It was customary for the session to have a sort of love-feast at the Sacraments, when roasted mutton and other eatables were provided. Tables were covered in the session-house, and strangers and others were invited, and a glass of good ale accompanied the feast. One would have thought there was little wrong in